

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Promenade Among Words and Things: The Gallery as Catalogue, the Catalogue as Gallery

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In the mid-19th century new casting techniques allowed for the production of huge building fragments. Well-selected cast collections would ideally display perfect series in galleries in which the visitor could wander among monuments and experience the history of architecture on a full scale and in three dimensions. The disembodied material of plaster proved capable of embodying a number of modern historical taxonomies and aesthetical programs, most importantly chronology, comparison, style, and evolution. Veritable showcases of historicism, the casts could illustrate in spatial arrangements new conceptions on the history, contemporaneity and future of architecture. The plaster cast became a main medium in which to publish antiquities as novelties for grand audiences, taking the printed and the published beyond the two-dimensional space of words and images. However, due to the increasing market of casts and their sheer size and weight, the reproductions as mounted in the galleries often behaved as disorderly as architecture does outside curatorial control. In the end only the catalogues, the paper versions of these imaginary museums, could create the order their plaster referents constantly aspired to destroy. An important chapter in the history of the architecture museum, these plaster monuments belong to a part of architectural print culture in which catalogues were curated and galleries edited. Metaphors drawn from the realm of writing saturated the discourse on the display of casts. Images and texts fluctuated and the image-objects were compared to books, paper, pages, documents and libraries but above all to illustrations inviting promenades in time and space.

A high-lofted room, draped with simple wooden shelves from floor to ceiling, surrounding a ledge of the same height covering virtually the rest of the floor, is filled with broken fragments. All kinds of associations spring to mind, from natural disasters and phantasmagoric ruins to large-scaled contemporary art installations with archival inclinations. In the somber winter daylight falling from a little strip of windows high up on one wall one slowly starts recognizing familiar form in the formless rubble: heads, torsos, a bodiless, classical leg tucked behind an ornamental panel in a corner; a tender medieval face, an apostle perhaps, buried in the debris of classical buildings; fluted drums, broken columns, capitals of all orders upside down or tilted, pieces of cornices, friezes and bas-reliefs; mutilated doors and portals, remains of balustrades, mantelpieces, pulpits, sarcophagi, baptismal fonts, as well as thinkable and unthinkable miscellanea.

The shelves provide some order, at least, some structure to the space. Yet on each and every shelf amounts of stuff are simply piled apparently without any system, amassed in a way that appears almost hallucinatory. The room is crammed with remnants of something that was obviously once art and architecture; fragments spill out of the

shelves and into the narrow paths where one can move around—or climb a ladder to inspect the treasures accumulated on the highest shelves, as I was generously welcomed to do. In fact, my first association when exposed to this storeroom under the Musée de Cinquenaire in Brussels was Anselm Kiefer's 24-ton Euphrates and Tigris bookcase sculpture from the 1980s, containing 200 crumbling, supersized books and manuscripts, made out of lead, steel and copper. The monumentality of Kiefer's piece is, however, dwarfed by the discreet shelving system on which every artifact is manufactured in one material, namely plaster. Where Kiefer's 'The High Priestess/Zweistromland' speaks with roaring pathos of lost civilizations, there is a low-key muteness to the ruinesque splendor of this storeroom. It certainly has a slight horror to it — a mass grave is also an association readily evoked — but above all this is a breathtaking space compiled of very dirty and dusty wonders (**Fig. 1**).

In a corner in an adjacent room one of the caryatides from the Erechtheion Porch looks a bit lost, leaning towards the wall, deprived of her verticality, architectural frame and fellow sister columns. Two larger-than-life and tail-less equestrian statues are stabled up under a tall shelf; if their mounted riders should still sit in their saddles — that is, on the level above — they are hidden behind lots of other casts, stacked in from all sides. And then there are the vast spaces stockpiling what must be thousands

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Figure 1: Lost orders, casts in storage, Brussels 2015. Photo by Mari Lending.

of seemingly neatly arranged and numbered moulds (occasionally casts appear between the moulds – positives amongst negatives, so to speak – such as more huge building fragments or the dismembered hand that ghostly reaches up from a crate). Some of these moulds are still in

use, as this Atelier de moulages still produces plaster casts. Should one wish to procure Phidias' Demeter and Chore sculpture from the west pediment of the Parthenon – something innumerable 19th-century museums in Europe and America did – its full-size version is for sale

for €5,450. When I was visiting, the crispy plaster white wings of Nike of Samothrace, just lifted from the moulds, were drying on the floor besides a yet new and pristine edition of the headless Hellenistic beauty. Plaster might, as Goethe claimed, lack the magic of marble and appear 'chalky and dead'. But also Goethe could appreciate the particular magic of a fresh cast. What 'a joy it is to enter a caster's workshop and watch the exquisite limbs of the statues coming out of the moulds one after the other,' he pondered while roaming the workshops of Roman formatori in the 1780s (Goethe 1962: 152).

In Brussels, the rare constellation of a salvaged if dilapidated cast collection, the extraordinary deposit of moulds and the present-day production of art historical staples encompass an essential part of 19th-century exhibition history and a substantial chapter in the history of the architecture museum. It assembles plaster casts in different states; past, future, present. Yet both the new casts that are currently produced by moulders in the workshop and the imaginary collection that could be cast from the depository of moulds in storage evoke a strong feeling of pastness. It is impossible not to think about chalk and death while wandering among the derelict casts and the massive collection of moulds. In its forlorn beauty and irresistible decay this – also historiographical – backstage forms a monument to an obsolete museum form. One cannot help wondering what kind of lost order the amount of disparate objects might stem from, before these plaster monuments were channeled, as were most 19th-century cast collections, out of the galleries and into storage, oblivion and destruction.

Orders of the Mind

In hindsight, the title of the 1902 catalogue of these relics in storage might appear ironic if not deeply melancholic (Fig. 2). The *Promenade méthodique dans le Musée d'Art Monumental* served both as an inventory and a guide to tour visitors through the galleries. The curator Henry Rousseau dubbed the publication 'an aide-mémoire, a methodological guide – or rather, a rudimentary handbook' (Rousseau 1902: II). The collection was at the time displayed in a very different splendor in the vast multi-building exhibitionary complex commissioned by the infamous Leopold II to commemorate the 50th anniversary of Belgian independence. In the 1880s a number of casts originating from different institutions were installed in an exhibition hall of cast iron and glass currently housing an air and space museum, including the display of 130 airplanes.

Today the collection appears emblematically antithetical to even a vague conception of anything methodic. In 1902 the *Promenade méthodique* mirrored the will-to-order that characterized the collections of plaster monuments that proliferated in the second part of the 19th century, at a time when the disembodied material of plaster was considered capable of embodying a number of modern, historical taxonomies and aesthetical programs, most importantly chronology, comparison, style and evolution. When the older collections of casts of classical sculpture transitioned from academies and palaces into public space, their character and scope changed. In

short, they became architectural and archeological. New casting techniques invented by Alexandre de Sacy, the moulder at the École de Beaux-Arts in Paris and his successor Eugène Arondelle, allowed for bigger and lighter casts (Pinatel 2003: 75). National monuments, recently unearthed ruins, and architecture from far-flung places transcended the classical tradition in both time and space.¹ Less preoccupied with notions of timeless beauty and universal standards the increasing assortment of architectural casts and their curatorial programs was all about history, or rather about ordering history. Veritable showcases of historicism, the plaster monuments were employed to display – to *illustrate* in spatial arrangements – new conceptions on the history, contemporaneity and future of architecture. Whatever principle chosen for the displays, the idea was exactly that of the promenade. The visitor was invited to wander among monuments and experience a condensed encyclopedic history illustrated on full scale and in three dimensions in the galleries. The *Promenade méthodique* belongs to a part of architectural print culture in which catalogues were curated and galleries were edited, and where word-image relations transcended the printed page. Symptomatically, Rousseau offered a promenade on paper and in plaster, both as a text to read and as a space to move through.

If the current disarray might perplex the accidental visitor of the storage spaces in Brussels, the fact is that this collection was also wildly criticized at its prime and exactly for an incomprehensible lack of any legible curatorial order. In the Grand Hall the east pediment of the Parthenon hovered over Pisano's pulpit from the cathedral in Pisa, Ghiberti's doors from the baptistry in Florence as well as the 8th-century Anglo-Saxon Ruthwell cross. In the surrounding galleries Pompeian, Gothic, Assyrian, Romanesque, Egyptian, Roman and Saracenic works appeared in confusing constellations. The museum was constantly accused of presenting a bewildering and terribly labeled mess of monuments, appearing exactly 'sans ordre'. In 1893 it was referred to as a 'véritable Babel' in the Belgian senate and new acquisitions obviously only made the display increasingly incomprehensible (Montens 2008: 30–32).

This critique was typical, however. 'The result conveyed to the mind of the ordinary sight-seer must be one of absolute confusion', a visitor complained in *The Times* in the 1880s, a decade after the Architecture Courts opened at the South Kensington Museum. He described the casts exhibited in purpose-built galleries as 'a gigantic curiosity shop arranged on no comprehensible principle' (Wainwright 2014). The collapse of order also distressed curators. Portraying the London collection as 'plus pittoresque', the Musée de sculpture comparée in Paris, founded on the initiative of Viollet-le-Duc and opened for the public in 1882, was based on Winckelmann's theory on the periodical development of art. The idea was to illustrate French architecture across history, in galleries devoted to successive centuries. However, due to the constant introduction of new monuments into the galleries and the French canon, the chronological scheme was duplicated in two directions when in 1899 the museum expanded into the Passy wing of the Palais de Trocadéro,

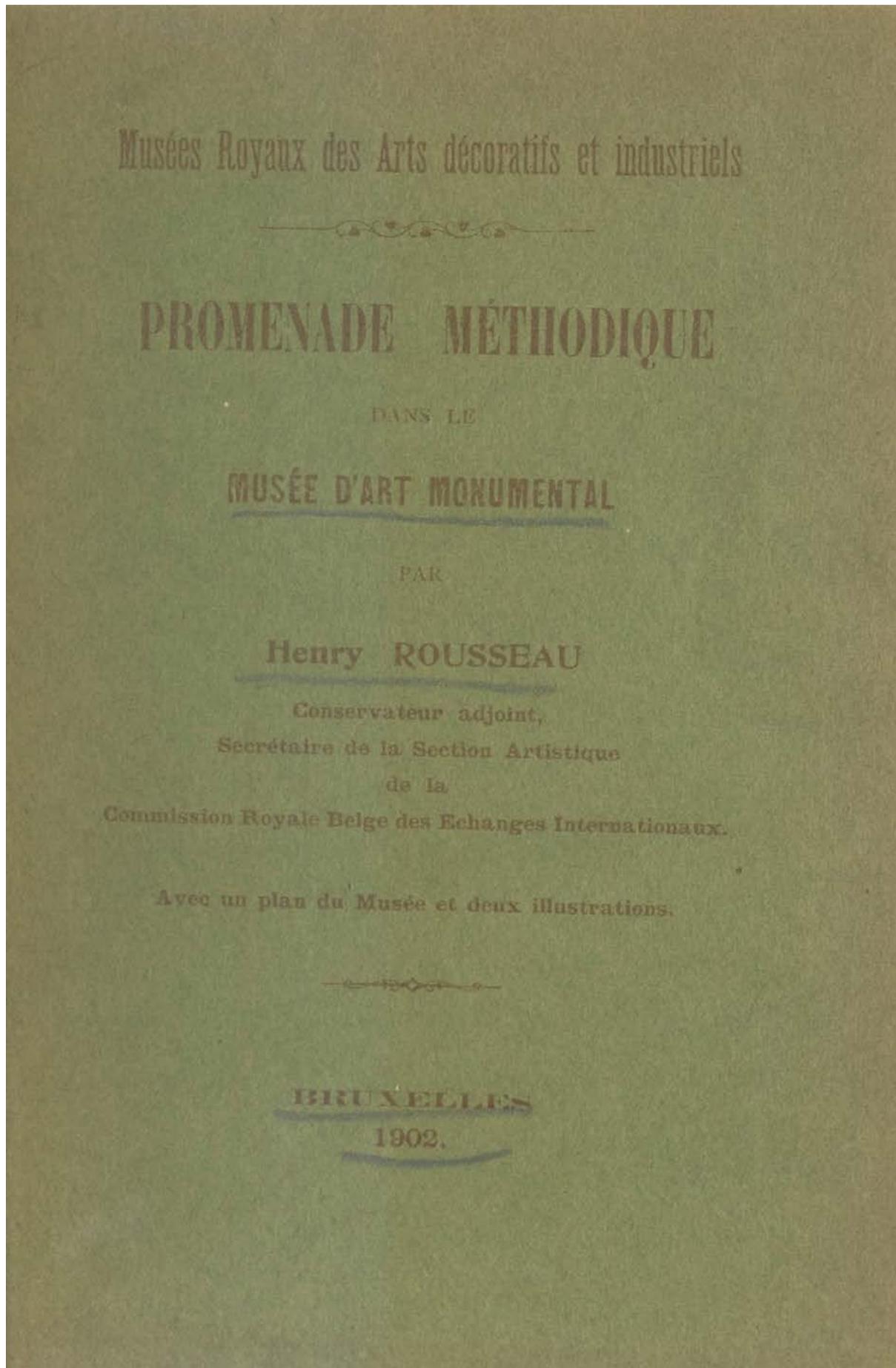


Figure 2: Cover of Henry Rousseau's *Promenade méthodique dans le Musée d'Art Monumental* (Rousseau 1902).

as remounting the colossal and fragile objects was out of the question. New casts, however, kept arriving, plaster monuments that found their proper place in neither wing, and accordingly, in the 1911 combined catalogue and guide, the director and archeologist Camille Enlart laconically stated that objects of this size could not keep entering the museum indefinitely. He begged visitors to excuse the erratic placing of monuments, and to traverse the galleries following the itinerary suggested in the catalogue rather than according to the spatially organized sequences. The reproductions were starting to behave exactly as architecture does outside curatorial control, and as such corrupting the ideal of French architecture as 'séries complètes', as the curated sequences was persistently heralded from the first catalogue raisonné issued in 1883. Not even cast collections could remain rigorous and chronologically perfect, Enlart concluded, realizing that only the catalogue could order the objects increasingly dispersed in the galleries (Enlart 1911: 7, 9).

Clearly, the tautology lurking in the title of Rousseau's 1902 catalogue reads as a desperate response to the relentless critique of the galleries. Both a promenade and a method indicate a step-by-step movement – literally and scientifically as well as figuratively and spatially (Fig. 3). No doubt, the publication was trying to gloss over the lack of correlation between paper and plaster, words and the three-dimensional image-objects in the galleries. Rousseau, however, made an observation that applies beyond the Brussels context, hinting at the complex relation of the casted fragments to the original monuments as well to the importance of catalogues in this world of reproductions. The scientific ideals for most cast collections were spelled out on paper, envisioning perfect orders for the massive and unmanageable objects that always threatened to fall into chaos, in the hands of troubled curators and before the eyes of disoriented audiences.

'Our goal', wrote Rousseau, 'is to unite in the mind these objects that are inevitably separated in reality'. This might sound obvious. While not even the best-equipped museums of antiquities, such as the British Museum or the Louvre, could display the history of art and architecture as unbroken chains, a well-organized cast collection could ideally present perfect historical trajectories. Reproductions could combine works in museums elsewhere with parts of buildings still in use and monuments at their original location, fulfilling 19th-century passions for continuous, legible series. Hence, the casts courts were sites to create order from disorder, to combine works 'inevitably separated in reality', and present coherent sequences even of something as resistant to museum display as architecture. While architecture in the real world of course does not come in any particular order, the reproductions could curate the past 'in a rational order', present 'the relations between the different and successive manifestations', and serve 'as milestones' on the itinerary through history (Rousseau 1902: II).

As the increasing corpus of architectural and spatial *illustrations magistrales* aiming at editing history in principally all-encompassing architecture museums, a corpus of catalogues were striving to bring order and to 'unite in

the mind' the unexpectedly unruly image-objects in the galleries.

Traveling Images

During the 1867 International Exposition in Paris the circulation of architecture received a particular push: Henry Cole, director of the South Kensington Museum, had fifteen European princes sign the 'Convention for Promoting Universally Reproductions of Works of Art for the Benefit of Museums of All Countries'. In encouraging the production of monuments in media such as casts, electrotypes and photographs, the convention envisioned an apparatus for letting three-dimensional images travel the world. Global in scope, brief in phrasing and aiming at immediate action, it theorizes plaster casts as an architectural mass medium, developing in parallel and intimately intertwined with photography, but capable of grasping in three dimensions what photography could only document in two. For the next decades this complementary 'Reproductive Continuum' (Baker 2010) was constantly reassessed. The 'fragment given by casts alone, consisting in the volume and the variety of the originals, is indispensable to the complete comprehension of an art fundamentally one of the sense of touch', according to a curator at the Boston Museum of Fine Arts: 'A photograph does not give the size, not the rotundity of sculpture; it is moreover a singular view, instead of the indefinite variety of aspects upon the artist in the round counts, and which the cast repeats'. He saw the two media, equally essential, illustrating rather than embodying 'the works they represent, and to illustrate them in a complementary way' (Gilman 1904: v–vi).

Cole's Convention gave recommendations for the formation of national commissions to select each country's most venerable historical monuments, to secure casts for its own museums, and to establish procedures for the international exchange of desired objects. This highly successful endeavor sprang, however, from the acknowledgment of the instrumental importance of catalogues. While preparing the Convention, the South Kensington Museum were procuring 'all printed catalogues' of the great collections in Europe, envisioning a veritable printed *musée imaginaire* (Granville 1869: vi). The venture testifies to a radical modernity reflecting rapidly developing reproductive technologies allowing for the dissemination of architecture on an unprecedented scale: 'Although the originals cannot be acquired, various modes of reproduction are now matured and employed', Cole stated in 1864 while working on the combined inventory of 'admirable substitutes', aiming at documenting museum holdings as well as monuments still at their place of origin (Cole 1869: vii). More important than the compilations Cole published in several volumes were the plethora of catalogues that soon proliferated across Europe and eventually in the US, forming the backbone for the cast industry and facilitating the circulation of monuments (Figs. 4 and 5). A subgenre within architectural print culture, these catalogues served different purposes and audiences. Museums renowned for their unrivaled collections of antiquities, such as the Louvre and the British Museum, produced casts for sale;

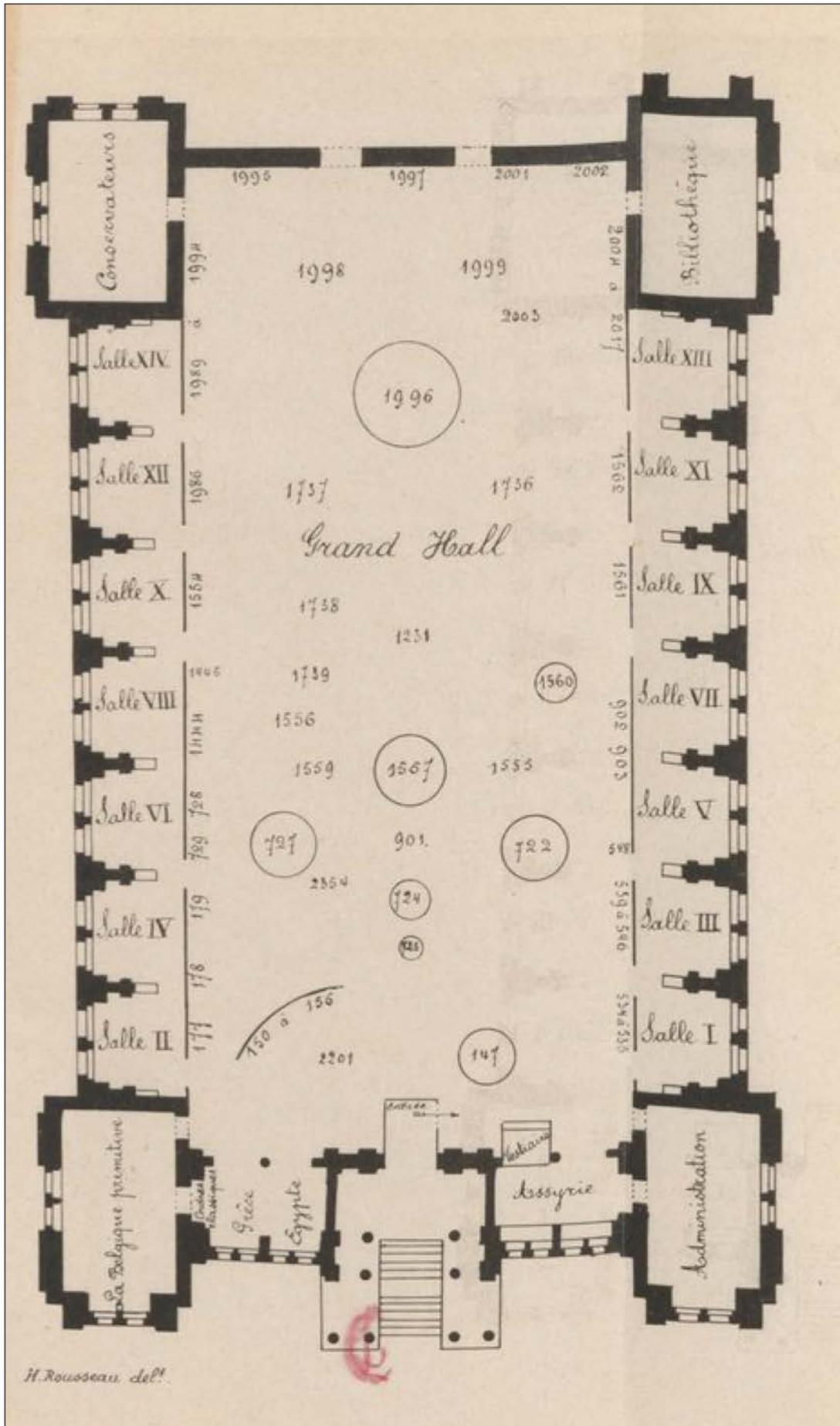


Figure 3: Fold-out plan of the galleries placed at the end of the 1902 Brussels catalogue: trying to subject the tour of the gallery to the chronological order of the catalogue (Rousseau 1902).

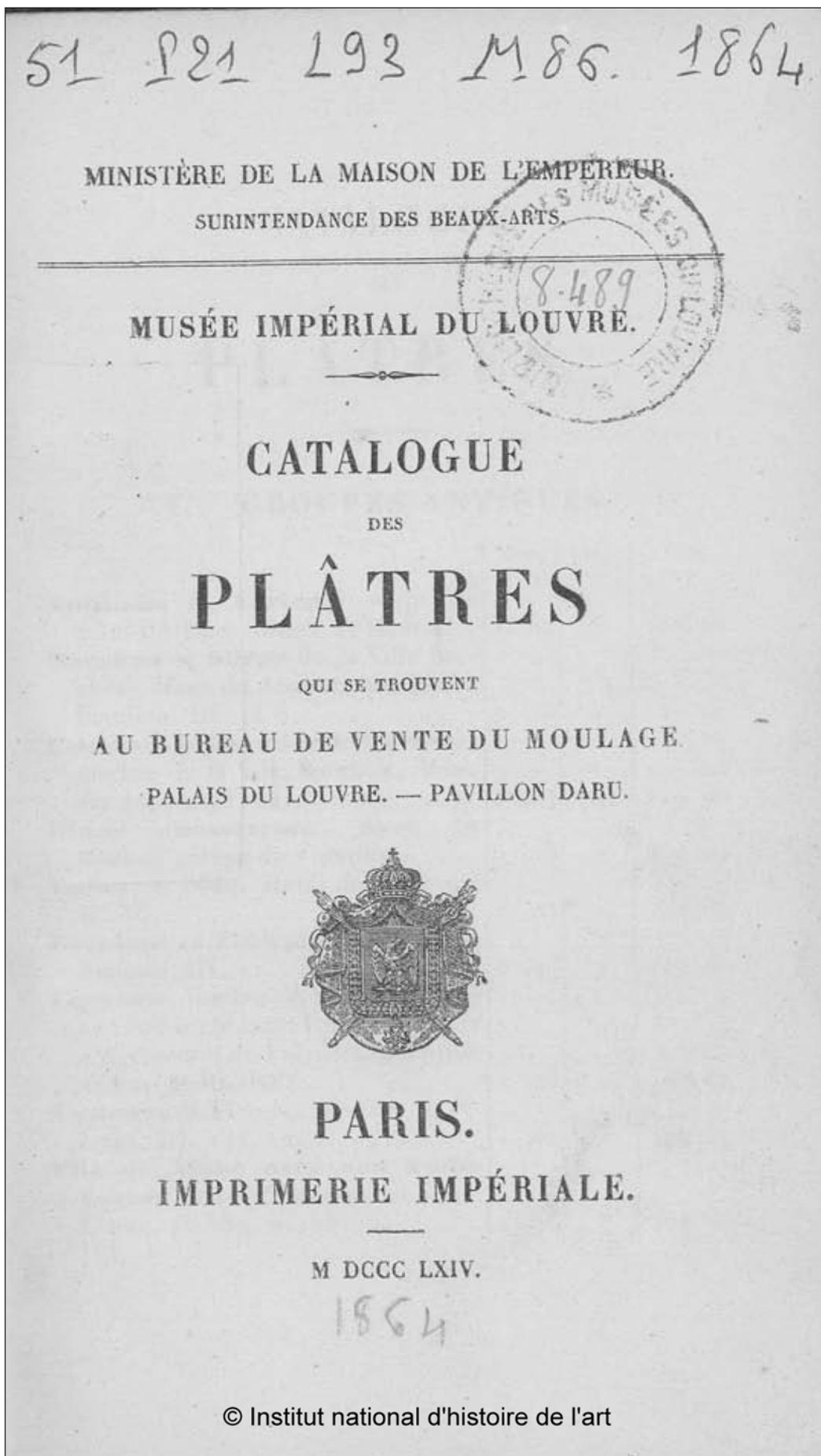


Figure 4: Cover of the 1864 sale catalogue of casts from the Louvre.

PRICES OF CASTS

FROM

ANCIENT MARBLES, BRONZES, ETC.,

IN

THE BRITISH MUSEUM.

*(Appended to the April Edit. of the
Synopsis, 1838.)*

PEDIMENTS, ETC., OF THE PARTHENON.

Nos.	£ s. d.
65. Hyperion	2 10 0
Right Arm of Hyperion [separate]	0 15 0
66. Heads of Horses of Hyperion	4 10 0
71. Theseus	9 0 0
77. Ceres and Proserpine	50 0 0
74. Iris	18 0 0
72. Torso of Victory	4 10 0
67. One of the Fates	22 0 0
63. The two other Fates	50 0 0
68. Horse's Head	1 5 0
70. Ilissus	8 0 0
76. Torso of Cecrops	3 5 0
118. Fragment of the Head of Minerva	0 7 0
75. Fragment of the Body of Minerva	2 0 0
64. Torso of Neptune	3 10 0
271. Fragment of Serpent	0 3 0
69. Torso of Victory without wings	4 0 0
73. Fragment of Latona	6 0 0
143. Torso of a Youth	0 7 0
79. Torso of a Female Figure	0 7 0
294. Torso of a Youth, probably part of a Metope	0 7 0
156. Fragment of a Female Figure	1 10 0
207. Capital of a Column [one quarter]	2 5 0

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Figure 5: From 1836, the British Museum produced casts commercially. This is the price list for casts from the Elgin Marbles. *Catalogue of Casts of Classical Sculpture in the British Museum*, London, 1838. ©Trustees of the British Museum.

respectively, classical and national monuments offered in the catalogues of the Parisian École de Beaux Arts and the Musée de sculpture comparée were shipped all over the western world (Figs. 6 and 7). An abundance of constantly updated sales catalogues from formative firms from Christiania to Cairo offered casts to be ordered by mail and were instrumental in a busy trans-Atlantic trade in monuments. Additionally, museum catalogues, handbooks and guides published articles on the monuments, authored by curators, scholars and archeologists, disseminating cutting edge scholarship to the public.

Differing in scope, these publications were in general sparsely illustrated. Occasionally, photographs contextualized the archeological sites from which the monuments were lifted, reconstructions of lost monuments, the intact buildings the cast were derived from, or the original piece as displayed in a museum. The catalogues hardly ever depicted the exhibit in the gallery. When Henry Rousseau in the 1926 catalogue to the Brussels collection included some photographs of the monuments as mounted in the galleries, that was a rare incident (Fig. 8).

An important exception is the catalogues issued at the Musée de sculpture comparée that published gorgeous photographs of the galleries (Fig. 9), and in 1897 commissioned a five-volume album, sensationally referred to by its archivist-as-curator author as a 'musée portatif', disseminating two-dimensional images of the three-dimensional image-objects in the galleries (Marcou 1897: Album I, preface). Further, the museum issued 1600 postcards depicting the casts from the photo studio Maison Neurdein Frères, circulating plaster on paper – by mail (Gampp 2010).

First and foremost, however, the constellation of words and images mirrors the catalogue and the gallery, twisting somehow the classical distinction of *verba* and *res*. The thing served as an illustration, and as such it distorted conventional relationships of texts and images. Designating indexes of architecture, these catalogues denoted imaginary realities and curatorial, taxonomical perfection unachievable in the real world. The catalogue's illustrative counterpart was the gallery in which the reader-visitor could promenade through history among full-scale, three-dimensional illustrations.

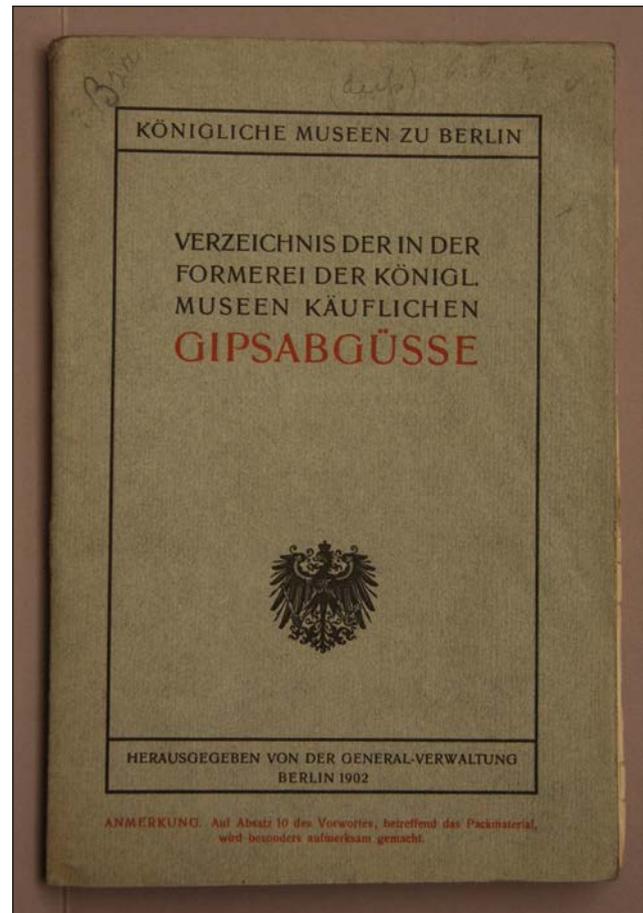
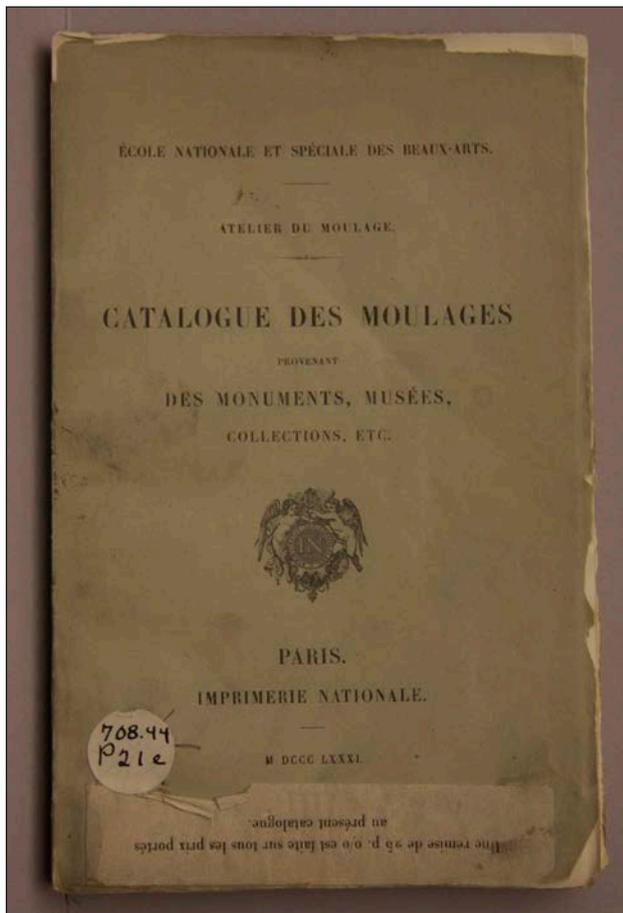
Publishing Casts

Museums were an integral part of 19th-century publication culture, as public venues where architectural representations were published for new audiences: 'Images for "publication," images that in the original sense of the word – make building *public*' (Lipstadt 1989: 109). This certainly applies for the way in which reproduction of ancient monuments were launched into the canon as novelties and presented to large audiences, and at an amazing speed. The circulation of two- and three-dimensional images from the German excavation of the Hellenistic city Pergamon makes an apt example of this dynamic of publication. In early 1881 *The American Art Review* reported on the first public display at the Altes Museum of the recently excavated fragments that had arrived in Berlin in 1879 and that were later constructed and exhibited as the

Pergamon Altar. The article was lavishly illustrated, mostly with plans, reconstructions and details first published in the 1880 *Jahrbuch der Königlich-Preussischen Kunstsammlungen*. It was, however, a different kind of images Charles Callahan Perkins had in mind for his home audience, eager to experience the effect of these Hellenistic wonders that 'literally sent the whole archeology and art history world into shock', by turning 'the received aesthetic of the Greek Winckelmannian ideal' upside down (Payne 2008: 170). The shock caused by the Pergamon marbles relied on spatial and sculptural features, qualities that were partly lost in two-dimensional reproductions. The two-installment article concluded by announcing that they make 'us ardently long for the day when we shall see casts from them added to the collections of Art Museums in America' (Perkins 1881: 192). His wish was soon fulfilled by the Formerei der Kgl. Museen in Berlin, and the casts published in galleries on both sides of the Atlantic.

Yet the earliest, most monumental and ambitious manifestation of the publication of architecture as full-scale, spatial illustrations was launched with the opening of the relocated and enlarged Crystal Palace at Sydenham in June 1854. The ten cast courts were frequently referred to as 'restorations' and 'living reproductions', but first and foremost, and with great consequence, as *illustrations*, as an 'illustrated encyclopedia' among which the visitor could promenade as among the pages in a book. At the Crystal Palace, in this first systematic presentation of a progressive architectural history in plaster as sequences to walk through, with a guidebook in hand, immersed in partly fantastical environments, the perception of casts as full-scale images made manifest an unforeseen conflation of print and exhibition culture. The press persistently referred to the casts as 'chief' and 'capital' illustrations, and encouraged readers to look at them while reading: 'Never before, and in no other place, has such a *ramassage* of the works of all periods and of all nations been seen: and the architectural courts must be studied with guide-books and correlative aid of all sorts' (*The Builder* 1854: 297).

The Crystal Palace had its own book series and journals and published architectural history in two and three dimensions, on paper and in plaster. From Egypt and Assyria through the Renaissance the courts formed a collection that not 'even a Roman emperor, with all of Greece to plunder from, could scarcely have brought together', claimed the Routledge guide *The Ten Chief Courts of the Sydenham Palace* (1854: 51) (Fig. 10). The courts made 'a perfect Cosmos – a brilliant illustration of all that is noble and elevating in the world': 'The Crystal Palace is a register of epochs, illustrating them by monuments of science and art, and then tracing the progress of intelligence from era to era in different countries,' declared *The Crystal Palace Expositor* (Piggot 2004: 53, 78). The audiences were offered a spectacular grand tour into what had hitherto been 'unattainable, except by laborious foreign travel', and to behold at one glance objects 'that under ordinary circumstances, would require years to have seen', stated the handbook to the Greek Court designed by Owen Jones and Matthew Digby Wyatt.



Figures 6 and 7: Sales catalogue of casts offered by the *École des Beaux-Arts, Paris* and *Königliche Museen zu Berlin*.

Actively pointing to the casts as the main illustrations, some of the handbooks would include images not enacted in the gallery, 'as means of affording ADDITIONAL information,' letting the promenading tourist add two-dimensional images to the spatial illustrations (Scharf 1854: v–vi) (Fig. 11). The courts demonstrated the interdependence of paper and plaster, and the catalogue as crux in framing the full-scale images in the galleries. As a medium in which to publish antiquities as novelties for grand audiences, the plaster casts took the printed beyond the two-dimensional space of words and images and into three-dimensional image-objects, to be experienced spatially.

During the summer of 1847, while the last shipment of artifacts awaited transport to London, Austen Henry Layard mused a bit melancholy as he looked back over his years of excavating the temple-palaces of ancient Nineveh: 'The ruins of Nimroud had been again covered up, and its palaces were once more hidden from the eye'. However he 'could not but feel some satisfaction': 'Scarcely a year before, with the exception of the ruins of Khorsabad, not one Assyrian monument had been known' (Layard 1867: 374). From having been 'buried for nearly twenty-five centuries beneath a vast accumulation of earth and rubbish', the architectural fragments were in the process of becoming museum exhibits and circulating collectables available for curatorial intervention, both as originals and reproductions (Layard 1849: v). Five years after the

publication of the folio *The Monuments of Nineveh* (1849), the Nineveh Court premiered at Sydenham. The court was a compilation of the ruins at Khorsabad, Kouyunjik, and Nimroud and combined fragments from three sources: Louvre's alabaster panels from the French excavations at Khorsabad, sculptures mounted in the Nineveh gallery at the British Museum, as well as casts Layard had made of elements in situ, from the same excavation fields that were forever lost when bulldozed by the so-called Islamic State in March 2015.

'In the Assyrian palaces we have the flesh and no bones', wrote James Fergusson, who designed the Assyrian Court in collaboration with Layard (Fergusson 1854: 85). That was exactly what the plaster designs were thought to provide, turning the Assyrian sensations into an imaginary totality 'to convey to the spectator as exact an idea as possible of Assyrian architecture', as Nineveh's excavator put it in the handbook, placed in 'the series of architectural illustrations of ancient history and art in the Crystal Palace' (Layard 1854: 34, 52) (Fig. 12). Oscillating between archaeological accuracy and atmospheric imagination, the court published history in the making with the casts as illustrations in a chapter of the successive development of architecture for the audience to promenade through. 'The Palace displays and guidebooks could be regarded as scrapbooks assembling contemporary archeological quotations,' observes Kate Nichols: 'They indicate that "archeological" debates were not restricted to museum staff, but

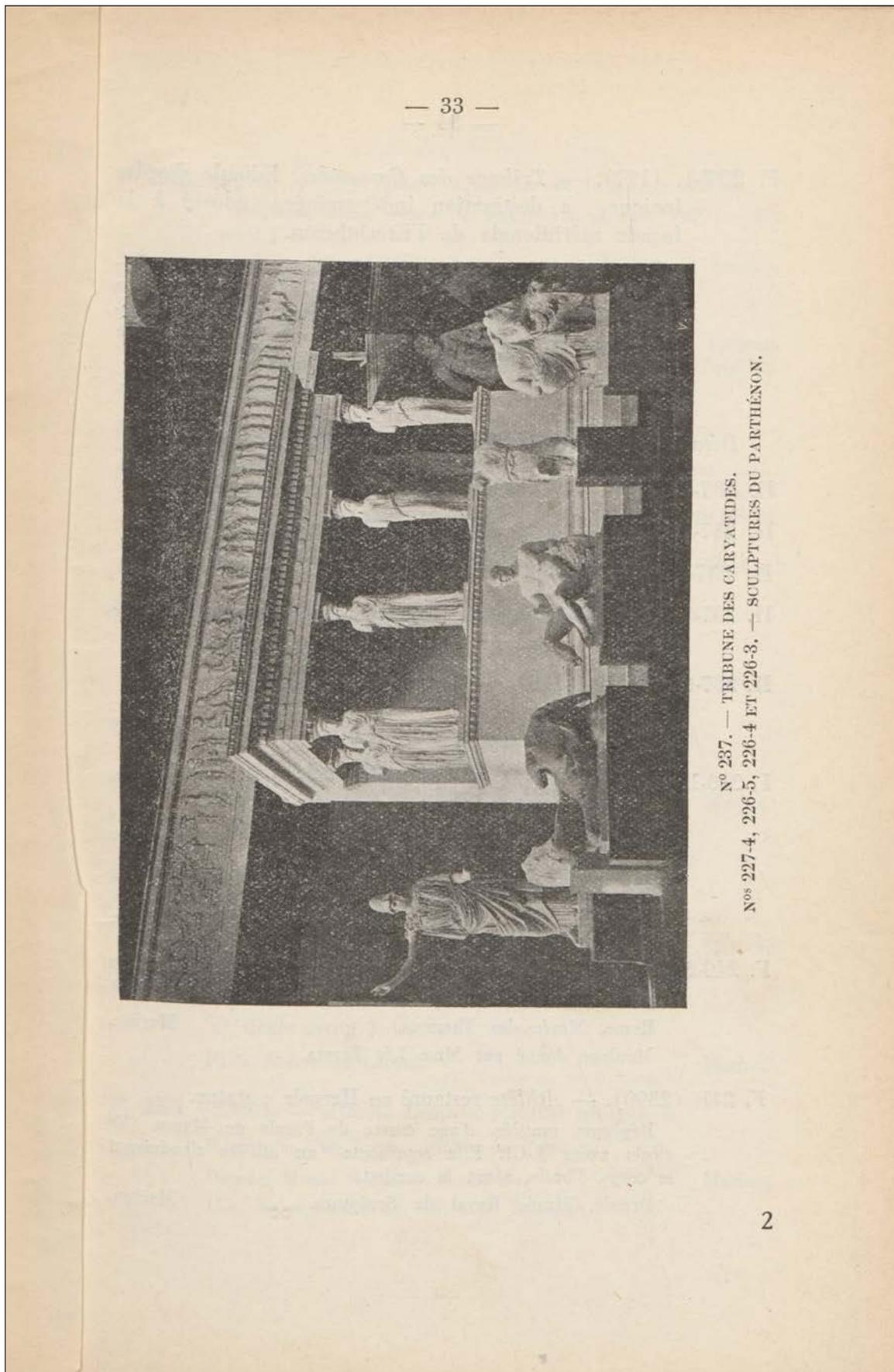


Figure 8: The 1926 Brussels catalogue included a few images of the casts as mounted in the galleries, among them Nike of Samotrache on her prow, the gateway of the Great Stupa of Sanchi, the portal of the Norwegian stave church Sauland, as well as the Erectheion Porch, complete with all six caryatids, surrounded by pediment sculptures from the Parthenon, placed on pedestals. Facsimile from Rousseau (1926).



Aile de Passy, Salle des XII^e et XIII^e siècles



Aile de Paris, Salle des XV^e et XVI^e siècles.

Figure 9: Walking through history in Paris. Facsimile from Enlart and Roussel (1910).



Figure 10: Layers of illustrations in the Crystal Palace. Images of the Architecture Courts at Sydenham soon circulated in the press. Here the Egyptian Court is accompanied by an extract from Samuel Phillips' *Guide to the Crystal Palace and Park, Illustrated by P.H. Delamotte* (London: Crystal Palace Library and Bradbury and Evans, 1854), pointing to the casts as three-dimensional illustrations. Facsimile from *The London Illustrated News*, Aug. 5, 1854.



The Parthenon in its present state, viewed from the N.W. angle.

THE GREEK COURT.

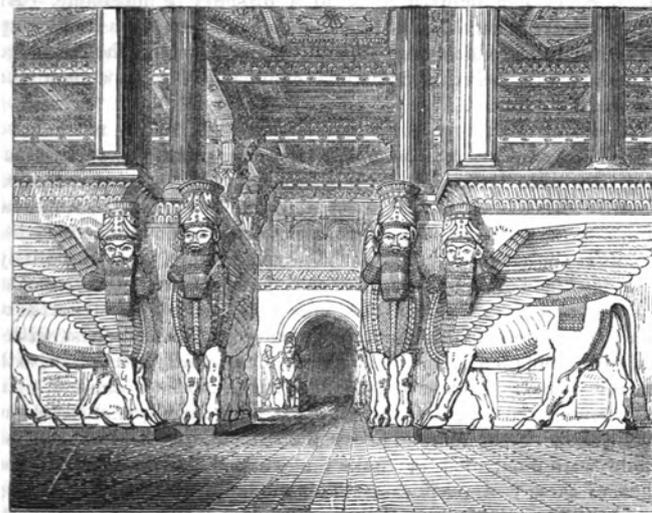
DESCRIBED BY GEORGE SCHARF, JUN.

ARCHITECTURAL ARRANGEMENT OF THE GREEK COURT.

THE principal Greek statues and basreliefs are contained within the Greek courts. These courts present an external façade with three entrances on the western side of the nave. The courts are placed, according to the chronological position of Greece in history, between those of Egypt and Rome. The order is Grecian Doric; the proportions have been copied from the temple of Jupiter at Nemea, which are less massive than Doric buildings usually are. The centre and larger entrance leads into the principal Greek court, and the two smaller into the side courts. On the architrave over the principal entrance is a Greek passage from Herodotus. Above the side courts are passages from the celebrated oration of Pericles.

Instead of triglyphs and metopes, as seen upon the model of the Parthenon, and, indeed, with hardly any exception, upon all Grecian Doric architecture, the frieze of this façade is decorated

Figure 11: The handbooks at the Crystal Palace provided 'ADDITIONAL' visual information for the visitors to consult while promenading through the courts. Facsimile of Scharf (1854).



Entrance to Nineveh Court.

ASSYRIAN ARCHITECTURE.

BEFORE describing the Nineveh Court in the Crystal Palace, it will be necessary to explain the nature of Assyrian architecture, and the grounds upon which we can venture to restore any portion of an Assyrian palace. All the edifices hitherto explored in Assyria were built upon platforms or artificial mounds raised to the height of thirty or forty feet above the level of the surrounding country. These terraces were partly constructed of earth and rubbish heaped together, and partly of regular layers of sun-dried bricks. That part of the great mound at Nimroud on which the more ancient palaces stand, appears to be entirely formed of such bricks carefully laid and united by tenacious clay. At Babylon, as the Greeks have informed us, and as existing remains still show, reeds were placed at certain intervals between the layers of bricks and the whole was cemented with bitumen; but this mode of construction has only been found in one instance in Assyria—in the high conical mound at Nimroud. The platforms appear in most cases to have been faced,

Figure 12: Henry Austen Layard points to two and three-dimensional illustrations while touring the visitor through the Nineveh Court. Facsimile from Layard (1854: 39).

extended to the public as a matter of interest' (Nichols 2015: 82). Nowhere has the idea of the architectural cast as illustrations unfolded more consequentially than in the vivid publication culture at Sydenham, editing monuments on paper and in plaster, conflating promenading and reading.

Orders and Disorders of the Book

Experiencing the Elgin Marbles in the British Museum under construction in Bloomsbury in 1818 made Antoine-Chrysostome Quatremère de Quincy conclude that architecture is most fully understood in the gallery, dismembered, displaced and fragmented. It is surprising that Quatremère should suggest the synecdoche as the topological basis of the modern architecture museum, because he had, in 1796, presented a fundamental museum critique on Napoleon's spoliation of art and architecture during the Italian campaigns. The 'true principle of destruction is decomposition' and to 'divide is to destroy', said

Quatremère at the time, who mobilized an ancient topos when claiming that artworks become incomprehensible when removed from their place of origin and lifeless when decontextualized into the arbitrary orders of the museum. 'What is the antique in Rome if not a great book whose pages have been destroyed and dispersed?' he asked, evoking the past as a book that will disintegrate to dust as a fragile ancient manuscript if not preserved carefully — a rescue operation that could only take place in situ (Quatremère de Quincy 2012: 100).

The idea of the world as a book builds on the fundamental principle that reality might be interpreted and deciphered as a written text. For Quatremère this book signified a cultural-organic whole made out of monuments and art works, climatic and topographical conditions, languages and mores. This totality is lost through time but its remaining fragments and importantly, the internal relation of these fragments, might still — and only — be understood in their original habitat. The metaphor of the

book as a partly spoiled all-encompassing totality and the tearing out of pages as the destructive work of both time and abrupt intervention changes when Alexandre Lenoir, simultaneously, compared his Musée de monuments français to an 'encyclopédie'. Lenoir's museum-as-book, opened to the public in 1794, did not point to a reality disordered through time. Rather it served as an editorial and curatorial device for the ordering of monuments salvaged from the vandalism of the French revolution into historical trajectories. This maneuver could only take place in the gallery. Installed in an abandoned cloister in Paris, the introductory space should read as the preface and the sequence of galleries as chapters. In promenading through the museum, the chronology of the centuries were traversed 'comme un livre' in which the objects could be read 'word by word' (Lenoir 1800: 48–49).² So, in Quatremère's anno the 1790s a book is an image of the past conceived as a universal but vulnerable whole, and inherently antithetical to the spaces of the museum. Editorial or curatorial interventions would only distort its order. Lenoir's book, however, metaphorizes a chronologically arranged museum and a spatial conception of history that can and must be edited to make the past legible, designating 'a spatial narrative transparent to its historical model' (Vidler 1987: 173).

If the allegorical power of the book has proved versatile in time, the printed book has remained at the core for the ordering of artifacts in the museum. Yet the book as an image for the editing of objects from across time and space made a fundamental turn in the way in which catalogues, inventories, handbooks and a number of other written scripts attempted to impose order onto the presentation of architectural casts, both factually and figuratively. These publications not only asserted that history could be ordered as a book; the book became the paradigm and the only place in which history could be invented, documented and explained. And this history as double-exposed in catalogues and galleries did not signify lost totalities; divided, decomposed or destroyed, but was rather a fragmentarium that could only be ordered by serialized fragments, by the act Henry Rousseau dubbed 'orders of the mind': orders made of things 'by nature separated' and which could only appear as continuums in the museum space. Metaphors drawn from the realm of written texts became ubiquitous and saturated the discourse on the display of casts. Images and texts fluctuated in the vocabularies: the image-objects were framed by textual metaphors and compared to books, paper, pages, documents, libraries and illustrations; illustrating the history of architecture in the galleries, allowing for spatial promenades through time.

Plaster Casts as Text *and* Image

Photographs of the Cour Vitrée at the École des Beaux-Arts in Paris record a collection in splendid order. Shot from opposite sides of the vast courtyard glassed in by Felix Duban in 1867, they show the gargantuan casts of the north-east corner of the Parthenon and the portico of the Castor and Pollux Temple at the Forum Romanum, hovering over classical statuary placed on plinths.³ The immaculate

order documented in the photographs was everything but obvious. 'In 1847 the École was far from the orderly museum it later became', writes Anne Wagner: 'Instead of neat rows of casts we should visualize clogged passageways, dust and packing crates, and fingers chipped off plasters in the confusion. Even as late as 1855 the situation was still desperate; a report from the Committee on Casts is the cry of men being buried alive by plasters: "Casts are everywhere in the École; cellars, attics, exhibition halls, all are invaded"' (Wagner 1986: 97). However, a school drowning in one of its main pedagogical devices did not eclipse the possible correspondence of well-ordered collections of casts and books. The curator whose job it was to make sense of the unstructured wilderness thought of the ideal display in analogy to libraries: 'This collection will have the aim and the usefulness of those libraries of Greek, Latin, German, English and Italian authors which the publishers never tire of reprinting'. Here, the curator parallels the cast and the book as two modes of reproduction within modern print culture, a standpoint much ventilated during the next decades: 'true copies of the great works of the great masters [...] shall bring them fully within the reach of all as printing does good books' (Cates 1866: 216). Wagner expands on the metaphor of the building as a book and the casts as pages when seeing 'the building as the container for an instructional text, an illustrated history of sculpture' – 'casts, not originals, were to fill its pages' (Wagner 1986: 98).

The closeness of casting and archeology popularized new monuments in museums and schools. In the many new departments of classical archeology the casts collections became an indispensable apparatus, complementary to the library. In 1870, when Charles C. Perkins – theorizing the foundations of American art museums – stated that with the originals 'widely scattered', the monuments of the past could 'only be attained through plaster casts, which in most respects supply the place of the originals, and cannot be dispensed with even in the presence of originals', he was quoting one of the leading archeological authorities of the time, the 'eminent German professor of archæology, Dr. Heinrich Brunn, who has the precious collection of marbles at the Glyptothek under his charge'. Brunn claimed that without cast collections 'the professor of archæology cannot illustrate his lectures' (Perkins 1870: 9–10).

Further, the textual framework of the casts is notable in the way monuments and documents tended to conflate, also in discourses of preservation. When the keeper of Antiquities at Bergen Museum in 1907 offered the 11th-century doorway from the Norwegian stave church Urnes to museums from St. Petersburg to New York, he referred to the cast as a 'document' and the casting operation an act of preservation (Shetelig 1907). When accounting the exchange of French and Belgian monuments with the Musée du cinquantenaire, the Musée de sculpture comparée (run under the auspices of the Commission des Monuments historiques), reported on the acquisitions as 'documents étrangers' (Enlart 1911: 8). When five French museums, including the Louvre and the Musée de sculpture comparée, in 1927 established one common

workshop to secure and facilitate both the casts and 45,000 moulds in stock, the catalogue speaks about reproducing documents in lieu of the originals (Angoulvent 1932: vii). Additionally, cast collections were discussed as catalogues in their own right. The Louvre continuously discussed making its own cast museum, one that in regards of chronology, comparison and completeness, was referred to as a perfectly curated catalogue (Dumont 1875: 420).

Casting the World

James Fergusson, who had designed the Assyrian Court at Sydenham in collaboration with Layard, became one of the harshest critics of the institution he was himself directing from 1856 to 1858. The architecture courts were instantly accused of presenting an illegible mixture of time, place, scale and polychromic excess: 'There are some minds which can only be approached by having their wholesome food so clogged with sweetness or so savored with spices as almost to destroy its nutritious qualities,' he said, making Digby Wyatt's Pompeian House and Owen Jones' Alhambra Court the only sound exceptions (Fergusson 1857: 16). Interestingly, he introduced yet another textual genre to frame the casts, equating the courts as fiction and comparing their instructional value as if 'teaching theology by means of the theological novel'.

Giving a talk on the incorporation of the Architectural Museum into the new South Kensington Museum in 1857 Fergusson was everything but politely congratulatory. Rather, he used the occasion to criticize both the Architectural Museum and the Architecture Courts at Sydenham, and to address the shortcomings of earlier attempts to form architecture museums, including Sir John Soane's Museum (despite its splendid 'architectural casts and illustrations') and Alexandre du Sommerard's Musée de Cluny in Paris. However, he took the opportunity to outline an ideal museum of architecture that would give England 'a more complete illustration of architectural art than any nation of Europe'.

It was not reproductions as such that troubled Fergusson. To the contrary, a scientific display of the history of architecture could only be achieved by plaster casts. The casts should, however, illustrate architecture in its current state: 'truth ought to be presented in its simplest and purest form, and the facts conveyed in the most direct manner to the mind'. He found the casts far more instructive in storage before being assembled into spatial, poetic fantasies, 'the capitals in one place, the pinnacles, the mouldings, the foliage, the canopies, & c., each in its own class and according to its date' (Fergusson 1857: 12–17).

The casts that had arrived at the Crystal Palace and were installed in immersive atmospheres by June 1854 were the result of three months of travel in the fall of 1852 by the directors of the Fine Art Department at Sydenham: 'Shortly after the erection of the first column, Messrs. Owen Jones and Digby Wyatt were charged with a mission to the continent, in order to procure examples of the principle works of art in Europe'. Armed with high-powered letters of introduction, they boosted the cast production at a number of institutions, including the Louvre, the École

des Beaux-Arts and the Glyptothek in Munich, where they, assisted by 'the instrumentality and influence' of Leo von Klenze, were 'permitted casts of the most choice objects in the Glyptothek for the first time to be taken' (Phillips 1854: 16). They went to Berlin, Paris, Rome, Turin, Venice, Padua, Vienna, Dresden, Munich, Stuttgart and Brussels, and radically altered the availability of architectural casts in the market (Kenworthy-Browne 2006).

Arriving crispy plaster-white at Sydenham, the 'architectural monuments' commissioned in 1852 became illustrations also in the heated debate on polychromy: 'I felt that to colour a Greek monument would be one of the most interesting problems I could undertake', Owen Jones wrote in *An Apology for the Colouring of the Greek Court*, 'not indeed in the hope that I would be able completely to solve it, but that I might, at least, by the experiment remove the prejudice of many' (Jones 1854: 5). Fergusson was not convinced, suggesting that the handbooks might help the visitor to 'disintegrate the greater part of the design, and if you can forget the colour and the repairs and restorations, truth might be arrived at last' (Fergusson 1857: 15). This was obviously a cumbersome way of maneuvering between the handbooks and their full-sized illustrations, and thus he encouraged the perfect, future architecture museum to take its inspiration from the voluptuous dryness of the well-ordered storage space, with everything in its place. This place depended purely on time: 'I need not hardly add that they must be arranged chronologically'.

This vision shares several aspirations formulated when the Musée de sculpture comparée was incorporated in 1879. However, despite the 'sculptures étrangers' that framed the collection at the Trocadéro, this was a national enterprise, inventing and illustrating the French tradition in plaster. Closer to fulfilling Fergusson's scheme was the grandest cast collection ever conceived, launched as 'an epitome of the history of Art by monuments' and 'THE MOST IMPORTANT COLLECTION OF CASTS IN ANY PART OF THE WORLD' (Marquand et al. 1892: 5). Core to this initiative was a catalogue intended for editing the galleries into perfect three-dimensional illustrations of the monuments of the world.

In the Province of Reproductions

In June 1891 Edward Robinson, the curator of classical antiquities at the Museum of Fine Art in Boston, embarked on a grand European journey on behalf of the Metropolitan Museum of Art. London, Berlin, Dresden, Florence, Milan and Paris were among the cities he visited on a tour that took place, as he reported in September, in 'the province of reproductions' (Robinson 1892: 25). Prior to this inverted Grand Tour, Robinson had prepared the 130 pages, handsomely designed *Tentative Lists of Objects Desirable for a Collection of Casts, Sculptural and Architectural, Intended to Illustrate the History of Plastic Art* (Fig. 13). At first glance it looks like a typical museum catalogue: a carefully organized inventory naming and numbering a comprehensive amount of objects, periodically ordered and subdivided in regards of national or regional styles, with separate lists for Egyptian, Assyrian, Phoenician, Persian, Cypriote, Greek, Etruscan, Roman, Byzantine,

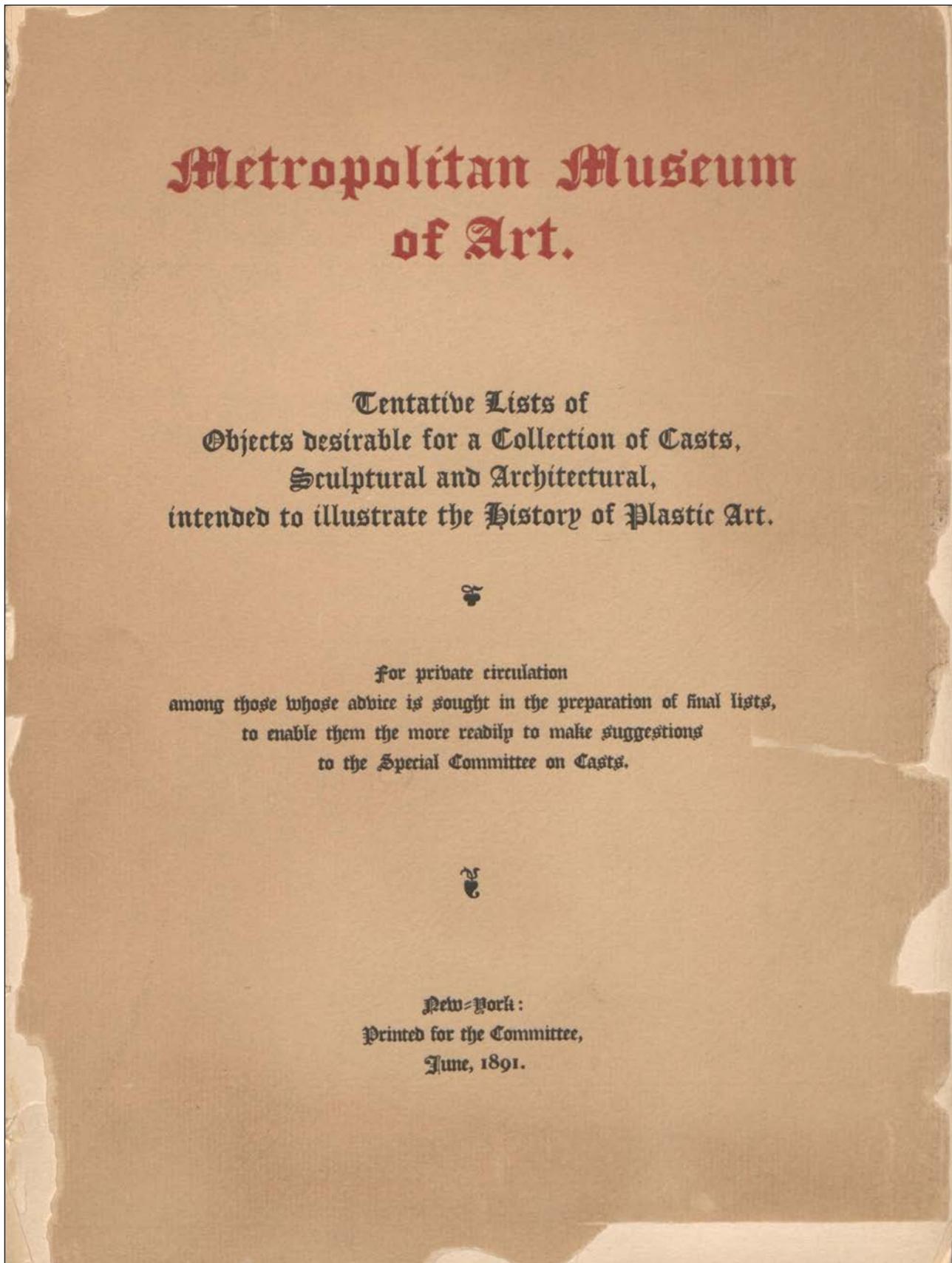
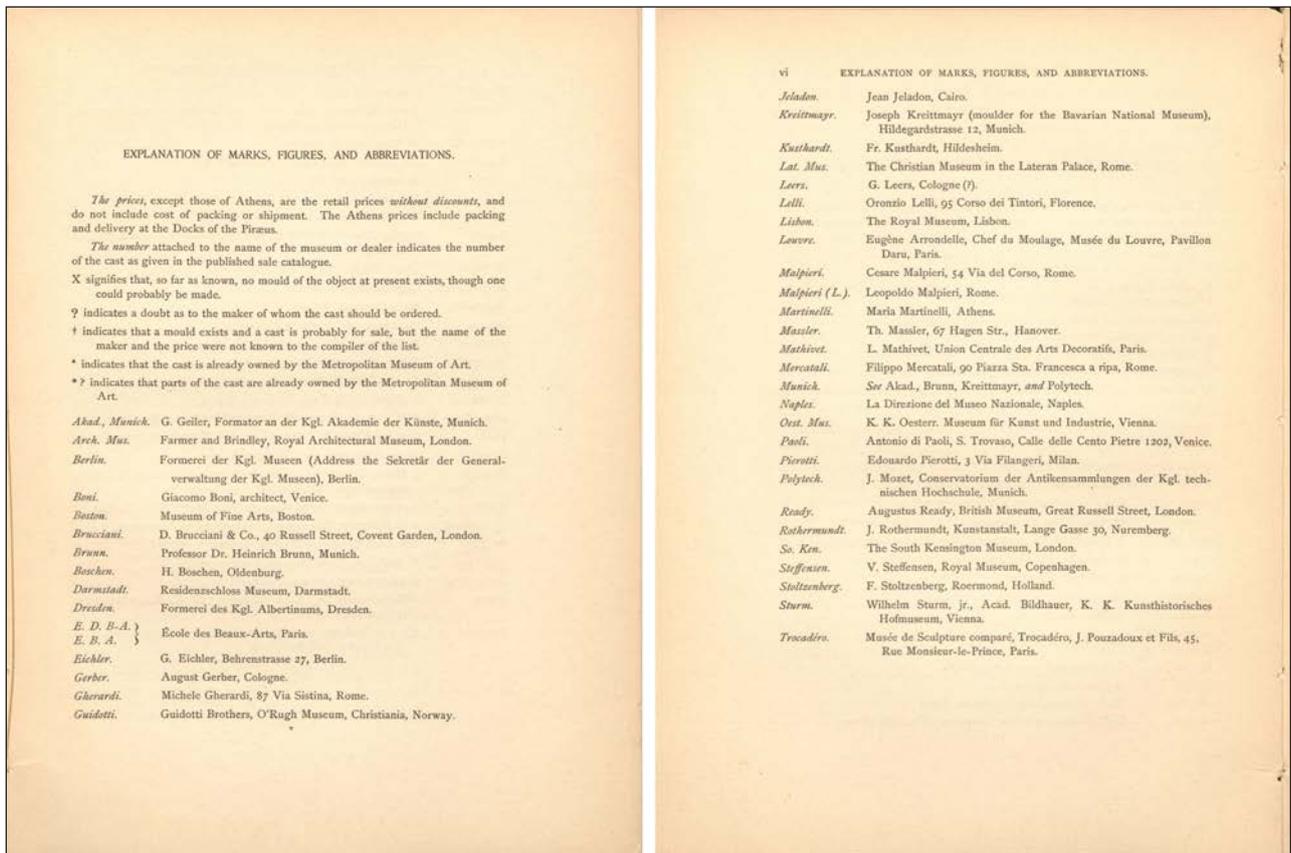


Figure 13: Facsimile, cover of Edward Robinson's *Tentative Lists* (1891).



Figures 14a and 14b: The list of abbreviations in Robinson's *Tentative Lists* (1891) documents his itinerary in 'the province of reproductions' as well as the state of the art of the late 19th-century cast market in Europe.

Romanesque, Gothic, Saracenic and Renaissance (Italian, German and French) architecture.

Already the words 'desirable' and 'tentative' in the title suggests that this is a forward-looking document, provisionally compiled as a preparation for a 'final list', as stated on the cover, or as 'a step toward a complete catalogue', as affirmed in the preface. It is thus a 1891 vision of a utopian museum, 'a catalogue of all desirable objects without reference to present limitations or means of space, and without reference to whether these objects had or had not been already cast'. Every desired object in the future collection, idealistically conceived but pragmatic in its planned execution, was methodically ordered – as far as possible – into four categories: 'Title of object', 'Original in', 'Buy cast from', and 'Foreign price'.

The index, with its chronologically arranged categories of monuments and the lists – in concert designating a world historical panorama of architecture – is itself captivating reading. However, the document's most fascinating section, and true ambition, is hidden in the enchanting dryness of the very first list, entitled 'Explanation of Marks, Figures, and Abbreviations' (Figs. 14a and 14b). A system of signs provides the key to the status of the desired objects. For example, the figure X 'signifies that, as far as known, no mould of the object at present exists, though one could probably be made'; while a question mark 'indicates a doubt as to the maker of whom the cast should be ordered', and so on. Tagged to the entries, and sometimes in combination, such coding makes the

'Buy cast from' rubric a particular thriller, at least for the exceedingly myopic reader. The list of abbreviations are somehow more straightforwardly legible, examples are: 'Akad., Munich', 'Brucciani', 'Kreittmayr', and 'Louvre'. As far as the desired objects existed in the market – if moulds were made or casts were in stock – its maker or copyright holder would appear in the rubric 'Buy cast from', indicating institutions and individuals, namely the main players and citizens in the province of reproduction in which Robinson was preparing his trip. These four abbreviations signify, respectively, 'G. Geiler, Formator an der Kgl. Akademie der Künste, Munich'; 'D. Brucciani & Co., 40 Russell Street, Covent Garden, London'; 'Joseph Kreittmayr (moulder for the Bavarian National Museum), Hildegardstrasse 12, Munich', and 'Eugène Arrondelle, Chef du Moulage, Musée du Louvre, Pavillion Daru, Paris'; altogether serving as an address book, coinciding with Robinson's itinerary.

This apparently trivial list of abbreviated information reads as a mise-en-abyme of 19th-century cast culture, a quintessence mirroring of a virtually infinite universe, a center governed and furnished by people, institutions and objects that could depict competing and changing histories of architecture. The plasticity of plaster far transcends the replicating of singular objects; a carefully selected collection could principally cast whatever configuration of the canon envisioned. As a guidebook to the province of reproduction, Robinson's compilation not only mapped the territory but aspired to its expansion by

including a number of monuments never before cast. If epithets such as ‘complete’ and ‘perfect’ that sprinkled the documents involved in this great endeavor described ideals rather than realities, this first *printed* version of the imagined collection strived at uncompromised completeness and perfection without regard to the cumbersome constraints of reality. Intended for ‘private circulation’, its most important addressees figured among the abbreviations: distinguished European museum directors, curators, archaeologist, art historians and formatori. They had received the document before Robinson’s arrival, and he met with them all to discuss, perfect and finalize the selection and to place orders for a collection that eventually would have ‘European scholars to come to New York as they now go to Rome, Athens, or the other great centers of the study of art, in order to see the perfect museum of reproductions’ (Robinson 1892: 9).

The Constitution of the Metropolitan Museum, incorporated in 1870, gave as a primary objective the formation of ‘a more or less complete collection of objects illustrative of the History of Art from the earliest beginnings to the present time’. Before American cultural ambitions, taste and fortunes changed, this historical illustration was for decades envisioned to rely heavily on reproductions:

We can never expect to obtain any large collection of original works, but we can obtain casts, which [. . .] are almost their equivalent; and these casts can be so arranged as to group together all works pertaining to the same epoch, however widely their originals may be separated, so that the whole history of plastic art can be traced through its masterpieces from the earliest to its latest time. (Marquand et al. 1892: 35)

The lack of original works was elegantly spun as a favorable tabula rasa in the first decades of the Metropolitan’s existence. Back in New York Robinson reported on the depressing state of European museum: ‘embarrassed’ staff, collections ‘which either illustrate the same point or have no bearing whatever upon the development of art’, ‘aimless accumulation’, ‘crowded spaces’ and hopeless installations producing ‘bewilderment in the visitor’s mind’, while outlining the perfect mounting of the collection of full-scale illustrations that would display a scientific ‘organic whole – a unit’ in the expanding museum in Central Park.

The last catalogue issued of this collection, authored by Robinson and published in 1910, the year he became the director of the Metropolitan, counted close to 2,700 entries. If an epitome of monuments in the end could not even be rendered in plaster, the proto-catalogue of 1891, in its Quixote’esque ambition of curating the world and editing the galleries, proved to be an epitome in its own right. This particular paper museum fulfilled 19th-century fantasies of curated and combined inventories of monuments, pointing to spatial illustrations inviting promenades through a perfectly ordered history, uncorrupted by their in the end unruly counterparts, the image-objects of the galleries.

Competing Interests

The author declares that they have no competing interests.

Notes

- ¹ For the casting of the 12th-century Angkorian temples in Cambodia, presented first at the 1867 World exhibition in Paris, see Falser (2013); for the Indian monuments commissioned by South Kensington, see Cole (1874).
- ² Plaster casts in fact appeared among Lenoir’s salvaged objects, and not only for non-French works (Egyptian, Greek, Roman), but to fill in gaps and create ambience and atmosphere in his spatial collages.
- ³ This enormous cast, however, with only two columns, was restored to its imagined, pristine state. The École des Beaux-Arts manufactured this monument in different scales and states of restorations at its Atelier du moulage, and offered hundreds of fragments and details (de Sachy 1881).

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